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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000208

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SOCI
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: COM EMPHASIZES REDLINES IN FRANK
CONVERSATION WITH NOTORIOUS NORTHERN HARDLINER

REF: A. 06 PRISTINA 518

[1](#)B. PRISTINA 169

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. During a conversation with E.O.-listed northern Kosovo Serb hardliner Milan Ivanovic on March 15, COM emphasized that Serbs are free to express their opinions about Ahtisaari's proposals and the UN-led status process underway, but that if their rhetoric spills into violent or provocative action, KFOR and the international community will respond decisively and robustly. Ivanovic maintained that northern leaders would not breach the redlines outlined by the COM, and he particularly denied that there was any intention to force Serb members of the Kosovo Police Service to resign or change uniforms. He claimed that the leadership's objective was to preserve the status quo, in which Kosovo Serbs have direct ties to Belgrade without interference from Pristina. COM made it clear that the status package would not alter day-to-day life for Serbs in Kosovo, except insofar as it would improve conditions and resources for the Serb communities, and repeatedly pressed home that the ball was in the Serb leadership's court to ensure that peace and stability continued to obtain in Kosovo. END SUMMARY.

COM Engages Northern Hardliner

[1](#)2. (C) On March 15, COM met with E.O.-listed northern Kosovo Serb hardliner Milan Ivanovic in northern Mitrovica. Ivanovic is a medical doctor and currently serves as the director of the large Serbian-state run parallel institution hospital in northern Mitrovica. He is also the deputy mayor of Zvecan municipality, chairman of the Mitrovica branch of the hardline Serbian National Council (SNC) and co-founder, along with fellow E.O.-listee Marko Jaksic, of the hardline Association of Serb Municipalities and Settlements (ASMS). Ivanovic and Jaksic are considered to be behind the June 2006 decision by northern municipalities to cut ties with Kosovo institutions (ref A), and are also notorious for using their

influence at the hospital to "encourage" employees to participate in the protests they organize. Their control over financial inflows to northern Kosovo from Belgrade's Coordination Center for Kosovo and Metohija (CCK) contributes to their influence (and to their reputation for corruption). Despite this, Ivanovic is regarded as more pragmatic than the violent and unpredictable Jaksic, who many characterize as the "king" of northern Kosovo.

13. (C) Ivanovic began the meeting by reiterating the well-known Serb positions on the Ahtisaari package and the "illegitimacy" of Ahtisaari's role as negotiator, saying that Kosovo Serbs categorically reject the status process as incompatible with their long-term survival in Kosovo. He also asserted his belief that Russia would block any effort to pass a UN Security Council resolution on Kosovo supplanting UNSCR 1244 and leading to Kosovo independence. In response, COM told Ivanovic that she did not wish to have a fruitless conversation debating the merits of the Ahtisaari plan or comment on the supposed Russian position; rather, she wanted to have a frank and open discussion of the coming period and what was expected of the Serb leadership in Kosovo.

Ball is in Serb Leadership's Court; IC Will Respond to Provocation

14. (C) COM emphasized that it was within the rights of the Serb leadership and all members of the Serb community to assert their opinions about Ahtisaari's proposals and Kosovo independence; where that rhetoric crossed into the realm of action, however, and particularly any violent or aggressive action, the international community would respond decisively and without hesitation. She pointed to clear redlines that would spark international response: inciting or engaging in

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violence against the international community or Kosovo Albanians; preventing employees of UNMIK or other international organizations from doing their jobs or accessing their workplaces; barricading streets or otherwise impeding freedom of movement; and pressuring Serb members of the Kosovo Police Service to leave the KPS or change uniforms and assert their allegiance to a local Serb authority.

15. (C) In any of these instances, COM underscored, the international community would be forced to react, leading to the possibility of confrontation and an escalating international police and military presence in the north -- an outcome that would clearly not serve the interest of the Serb leadership. In essence, she said, the ball was in the northern Serb leadership's court to maintain peace and stability and avoid tragic consequences for the Serbs of Kosovo. She made plain that no one would seek to force the pace of implementation of the Ahtisaari provisions nor disrupt the daily life of Serbs north or south of the Ibar, but noted that the possibilities for additional resources and authorities inherent in the Ahtisaari plan could only redound to the benefit of Serbs. She also pointed out that Ivanovic and Marko Jaksic had made no friends and won no support for themselves in the Kosovo Serb community when they insisted some months back that Serb civil servants give up their PISG salaries; Ivanovic laughed and acknowledged that this was so.

16. (C) Ivanovic himself raised the recent attempt to create an alternate Serb leadership in the form of an inaugural Serbian National Assembly in Gračanica on March 4, an effort brutally quashed when northern-organized thugs (under Jaksic and Ivanovic's instigation) broke up the session by shouting the speakers down (ref B). Ivanovic insisted that the session's disruption was engineered not by the northern leadership but by "citizens" angry with the effort to "split the Serb community," and hinted that any attempt to reconvene the Assembly would be met with the same fate. COM observed that she would have to be pretty foolish to believe that ordinary citizens were behind the violence. She noted that

while Ivanovic likely regarded the message of intimidation to moderate Serbs as a success for the northern leadership, he should remember that the international community was closely following these developments and would draw its own conclusions -- and plan its future responses -- having witnessed the northern leaders' willingness to pursue an aggressive and threatening course. She emphasized again that it would rest in the leadership's hands to avoid provocations and confrontation over the coming period.

Ivanovic Careful, Cautious

16. (C) An alert Ivanovic, listening attentively, maintained several times that northern leaders had no intent to engage in unilateral actions that would breach the redlines COM had expressed. (Note: We have sources indicating that just such actions have in fact been contemplated recently by the top northern Serb leadership, as they weigh their responses to the upcoming presentation of the Ahtisaari plan to the UN Security Council and the possibility of a future UNSC resolution on Kosovo.) He referred to any claims to the contrary as "misinformation," adding very carefully (looking as though he and his cohorts had indeed considered this) that there was no reason to tamper with the workings of the Kosovo Police Service. (Notably, he said nothing about alternate or clandestine "civil protection forces" and at one point early in the conversation claimed that Kosovo Serbs, if forced to accept independence, would "defend what was theirs.") Ivanovic argued that Serbs in the north want only to preserve the status quo and continued access to Belgrade institutions and funding, without interference from Pristina. COM noted that no one was threatening to disrupt or end those ties, and stressed that if any misfortune befell the Serb community because of an escalating spiral of violence, it would be due

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to bad decisions made by their own leadership; no one wanted to see a repeat of Knin or Krajina in Kosovo.

Comment

17. (C) Ivanovic was quite clearly in listening mode. He was far more restrained in his views and comments than in previous meetings, politely referring to Albanians as "Albanci" rather than the derogatory "Shiptari" he and other northern hardliners usually favor, and quickly falling off the customary rant about historical grievances once he understood the seriousness of COM's message. It is plain that he and his comrades are contemplating their options in advance of the events of the approaching political season in Kosovo. We will make plain the advantages to the Serb leadership of keeping the current environment in place, no matter what the political outcome in New York, and the real consequences should they choose to swing from angry rhetoric into a serious breach of the peace. We believe that there is some room to affect their calculations, though logic will likely be the first casualty in the north and elsewhere as soon as the "independence" word becomes a reality and emotions -- on both the Serb and Albanian sides -- take center stage. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Post does not clear this message for release to UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW